Draft
Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Assessment

State Route 138 Widening Project From Avenue T to State Route 18 Junction Through the Communities of Littlerock, Pearblossom, Llano and the City of Palmdale

SCH Number: 1998091007

Caltrans

District 7 • 120 South Spring Street • Los Angeles, California

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THE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This section has been designed to show you the Caltrans project development process. To help explain the Project Development Process at Caltrans, portions of the Caltrans publication *"How Caltrans Builds Projects"* are presented below.

The Caltrans project development process begins with feasibility studies and ends with a completed project. It melds engineering requirements, public involvement and federal and state approval steps, and is governed by a host of laws and regulations pertaining to programming, environmental effects, right of way acquisition and contracting for construction. The basic steps are:

1. Identify Project Need
2. Prepare Initiation Document
3. Form Project Development Team
4. Prepare Project Study Report
5. Secure Project Funding
6. Prepare Draft Project Report
7. Perform Environmental Studies
8. Secure Project Approval
9. Prepare Plans, Specifications, and Estimates
10. Acquire Rights of Way
11. Obtain Approvals, Agreements, and Permits
12. Construct and Complete Construction Project

HOW PROJECTS GET STARTED

Caltrans, the local agency or both do considerable planning, before project development starts. A need is identified, either as a structural or operating deficiency of the existing road, or in response to planned land use changes such as a new subdivision, shopping or industrial center. Identification of such a need may result in a project as minor as a traffic signal or as major as a freeway.

WHY BUILD IT?

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A project must satisfy a clearly defined need and purpose. It must meet state, regional and local goals and objectives and, for capacity-increasing projects, air quality goals. System planning is a start in defining a project's purpose, but the project's purpose statement is reexamined constantly. It will drive the project development and environmental processes and ultimate approval of the project, and is essential in getting public consent.

PROJECT INITIATION

Generally, the origination of any new project requires a Project Study Report (PSR) for larger projects, or Scope and Summary Report (PSSR) for smaller ones. A Project Study Report is a substantial document that contains a report of preliminary engineering efforts, a detailed alternatives analysis and cost, schedule and scope information. A Project Scope and Summary Report is an abbreviated document that contains a very brief project description, cost, schedule and scope information, for a project that is exempt from detailed environmental study.

Project development starts when a Caltrans project manager is named and secures an expenditure authorization, then begins a project work plan to cover project initiation in detail. He or she determines the disciplines needed to develop the project and forms the project development team.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT TEAMS

Project Development Teams employ different disciplines to develop and evaluate alternatives, help project managers direct studies, make recommendations and carry out the project work plan. Members of project teams participate in major meetings, public hearings and community involvement. The teams consist of a wide range of disciplines and individuals from both Caltrans and outside agencies and may even include representatives from community groups.

PROGRAMMING

Before formal project studies can commence for State-funded projects, the project must be programmed. Projects may be listed in the State Transportation Improvement Program or in the State Highway Operation and Protection Plan or various minor programs approved by the California Transportation Commission.

Senate Bill 45, passed in 1997, placed 75% of State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds under the control of California's regional transportation agencies. Within the regions, cities and counties nominate projects for inclusion in Regional Transportation Improvement Programs (RTIP). Projects compete with one another through a process that is established by each region. Caltrans assists the regional agencies, when requested to do so, in the development of regional plans.

Twenty-five percent of STIP funds are nominated by Caltrans through the Interregional

Transportation Improvement Program.

PREPARE PROJECT REPORT & ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

The basic document that provides information for decisions regarding a project's ultimate scope, schedule and cost is the Project Report. This report, based on preliminary engineering analysis, contains information about the project's background, need and purpose, alternatives investigated and issues encountered in the engineering and environmental investigations. Issues encountered may be environmental issues, air quality conformity, permits, right of way issues, traffic management plans, and various other engineering issues and funding.

Activities in this phase include preliminary engineering and various studies, including surveys and mapping, traffic forecasts and modeling, value analysis, hydraulic studies, right of way and utilities impacts, railroad issues, materials and geotechnical information, and multi-modal issues. Alternatives that are studied in detail must comply with legal and administrative requirements and be technically and economically feasible. The environmental document is also prepared at this time.

A Draft Relocation Impact Report is prepared at this time, which details the direct and indirect impacts on businesses and residents, both owners and tenants, in the project area.

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

The environmental document discusses the affected environment and compares and evaluates the possible impacts of each alternative. This document is used by the decision-makers in deciding which alternative would best satisfy the need and purpose of the project with the least environmental impacts.

The environmental document must outline the need and purpose and the reasons why some alternatives were set aside. All significant adverse effects for each reasonable alternative must be identified and for each impact, mitigation measures proposed which would lessen the impacts of the alternative.

Effects that must be considered include those on the natural environment, architectural and cultural issues, social issues and hazardous materials, involving as many as a dozen separate studies. At this time, Caltrans consults with State and Federal agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Army Corps of Engineers, California Dept. of Fish and Game and other agencies, which may have concerns in the area.

Projects must comply with all applicable environmental laws, including the Endangered Species Fact, Clean Air and Water Acts, Wetlands Executive Order, and the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) regarding taking of parklands, historic sites and other sensitive lands. Compliance with these acts and other State

and Federal regulations is usually established in the environmental document after review by agencies with responsibilities in those areas.

PROJECT APPROVAL / ENVIRONMENTAL APPROVAL

After the environmental studies for the practicable alternatives are complete, the Draft Project Report is approved and the draft environmental document is circulated for comment. A preferred alternative is not usually recommended at this stage; however, if one is presented, the discussion of the preferred alternative documents factors considered in its selection.

The project development team communicates regularly and informally with those whom the project is likely to affect and secure their consent to project implementation. In addition, the project development process requires formal public comment for projects with significant effects.

FINAL PROJECT APPROVAL

After the project development team has analyzed the public comments, it selects the preferred alternative, completes the final environmental document and attaches it to the Project Report, which should also document selection of the preferred alternative and discuss changes in the project as a result of public comment. If Federal funding is involved, the project must be approved by the Federal Highway Administration and a Record of Decision is published in the Federal Register. A Notice of Determination is published in the State Clearinghouse Newsletter. If the project contains no federal funds, approval of the project is by the California Transportation Commission.

COMPLETE PROJECT DESIGN AND PREPARE PS & E

Preparation of detailed Plans, Specifications and Estimates (PS&E) cannot begin until completion of project report and environmental approvals. In this stage, project information is reviewed and updated, purpose and scope are refined, design surveys and photogrammetric mapping obtained, and reports, including traffic data, hydrology and hydraulic, geotechnical design, pavement design, materials and soundwall design are completed. Final right of way requirements are determined and site plans are prepared.

ACQUISITION OF RIGHTS OF WAY

Acquisition of Rights of Way can begin only after completion of the environmental document, although some preliminary work, such as appraisals, can be started.

Relocation Impact studies are required on all projects that displace any person or business. A final relocation impact study will have been completed for the preferred alternative and included in the Final Environmental Document.

APPROVALS, AGREEMENTS, AND PERMITS

Other agencies protect resources under their jurisdictions by requiring mitigation of project effects or through approvals and permits. Negotiations with other agencies occur throughout engineering and environmental studies, project approval, and design. Negotiations usually reach closure at about the time of project approval or shortly thereafter. Among the necessary permits and approvals, depending on the resources affected by the project, are

Permits:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineer
- Clean Water Act; Section 404 permit
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service NEPA, Section 7 permit
- California Department of Fish and Game
- 1601 Streambed Alteration Agreement
- State Water Resources Control Board
- Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Department of Health Services
- Air Pollution Control/Air Quality Management District
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Works
- City of Palmdale
- California Department of Water Resources

Agreements:

- Cooperative Agreements with Local Agencies
- Interagency Agreement
- Department of Parks and Recreation

Approvals:

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) 106 Clearance
- Section 4 (f)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Air Resources Control Districts
- Public Utilities Commission

CONSTRUCTION OF THE PROJECT

Once the necessary permits and approvals have been obtained and the right of way purchased, construction can begin. The Plans, Specifications and Estimates are sent out for bid and a contractor is selected.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

PURPOSE:

Welcome to Caltrans' Route 138 Pearblossom Highway widening project Website. The purpose of our website is to keep individuals, public interest groups and governmental agencies up to date on the status of the proposed Route 138 Project. From our website you can access information about the alternatives under consideration, be placed on our mailing list, find answers to frequently asked questions, learn about new project information, and have access to environmental data. You can also communicate with Caltrans staff. You can do all of these things using the links on the webb site.

THE PROPOSED WIDENING PROJECT:

This project proposes to widen State Route 138 between 0.5 mile (0.8 km) east of Avenue T and the Junction with State Route 18. It consists of four 12-foot (3.6 m) wide lanes, 8-foot (2.4 m) wide shoulder on each side of the highway, and 16-foot (4.8 m) wide median for turning lanes.

Due to the high traffic volumes, including truck traffic, state and local governments and the general public are concerned about congestion, delay and safety on Route 138 through the communities of Littlerock, Pearblossom, and Llano.

Caltrans is currently examining alternatives to address these concerns. Three alternatives, in addition to the No Project Alternative, are being considered and they are as follows:

Alternative No.1 – along the existing alignment from Avenue T to the Junction with state Route 18. The alternative also proposes the following:

Realign the five curves at or near 72nd St East; 116th St East; 175th St East; Avenue W; and State Route 18 Junction.

Remove the existing Little Rock Creek Bridge (Bridge No.53-0303R) and

widen the existing Little Rock Creek Bridge (Bridge No.53-0303L) to the north side.

Widen the existing Little Rock (California Aqueduct) Bridge on both sides.

Replace the existing Big Rock Wash Bridges (Bridge Nos.53-0313 and 53-0314

Shift the highway alignment approximately 12' (3.6 m) to the north to avoid impacting the commercial areas on the south side of the highway in Pearblossom.

Raise the highway profile to accommodate drainage culverts between 1.2 mile (2 km) west of the Big Rock Wash Bridges and the Junction with Route 18.

Realign the highway approximately 82' (25 m) to the south to avoid impacting the Llano ruins and to accommodate drainage requirements.

Modify Route 138 and Route 18 Junction approximately 0.2 mile (0.3 km) west of its present location and add a connector from eastbound Route 138 to eastbound Route 18. The connector consists of one 12-foot (3.6 m) lane and one 8-foot (2.4 m) shoulder on each side of the traveled way.

Alternative No. 2 – same as Alternative No.1, except that near the community of Littlerock where it is constructed on a new alignment. At this point, the new alignment will shift south; then continuing along Avenue V and finally rejoining the highway at the intersection of Avenue V and Pearblossom Highway.

Alternative No. 3 – same as Alternative No.1, except that near the community of Littlerock where it constructed on a new alignment. At this point, the new alignment will shift south; then continuing along Avenue V, then near 82nd Street East continues along Fort Tejon Road and finally rejoining the highway at the intersection of 116th Street east and Pearblossom Highway.

Alternative No. 4 – "No Project Alternative" Under this alternative, no action would be taken to construct any improvements along this portion of Route 138.

A preferred alternative will not be selected until an environmental document is prepared and approved

PROPOSED PROJECT FEATURES:

The main project features include:

- Two 12-foot (3.6 m) wide lanes in each direction
- 8-foot (2.4 m) wide shoulders in each direction

- 16-foot (4.8 m) wide median to be used as a two way left turn lane
- Curb, gutter, and sidewalk through town
- Typically, widening will take place on both sides of the highway
- The cross slope for the lane will be at 2%
- The cross slope for the shoulder will be at 5%
- The side slope will be 6:1 or flatter

STUDIES ARE UNDER WAY:

This site contains the most current information available. It may change as final environmental and engineering studies are completed. As Caltrans staff develops the environmental and engineering studies, we will update the site

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PROJECT FACT SHEET

PROJECT LIMITS:

Pearblosssom Highway (State Route 138) from Avenue "T" to Junction with State Route 18.

DESIGN FEATURES:

- Two 12-foot wide lanes in each direction
- 8-foot wide shoulders in each direction
- 16-foot wide median to be used as a two way left turn lane
- Curb, gutter, and sidewalk through town
- The alignment is shifted to the north to avoid the businesses and the homes, including the post office near 123rd St. East.

RIGHT OF WAY FEATURES:

- Right of Way width ranges from 52 feet (15.85m) to 120 feet (36.58m).
- Temporary Construction Easements from adjacent properties may be required to reconstruct access from proposed highway to the existing driveways.
- Relocation of businesses, homes, or residents is anticipated.

- Utility poles will be relocated behind the sidewalk

CONSTRUCTION FEATURES:

- Construction of the project will be completed in two stages
- Access to existing cross streets and businesses and homes will be maintained.
- Construction staging does not require detours.
- Fire trucks, ambulances, and police vehicles will have access at all times.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

A Web page for the project is under construction. It will have information about schedules, right of way, design issues, local issues, construction information, etc.

Press releases to all local media outlets, including newspapers, local cable access stations; local radio stations, etc. will be made available prior to any closures.

Community meetings will be scheduled, as necessary, to maintain the community informed on the status of the project.

The Office of Project Development B personnel will be available to answer any questions members of the community may have and will meet with them to explain the project upon request.

CONTACTS:

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STAGE CONSTRUCTION

Construction of the project will be completed in two stages:

Stage 1 – Construct new pavement on the north side of the existing highway. Maintain eastbound and westbound traffic on the existing highway.

Stage 2 – After Stage 1 work is completed, move eastbound and westbound traffic onto the newly paved roadway and construct the remaining pavement on the south side of the highway.

Access to existing cross streets, businesses, and homes will be maintained at all times.

Construction staging does not require detours.

Fire trucks, ambulances, and police vehicles will have access at all times.

Helpful Travel Tips

In addition to staying informed, the following suggestions will help make your drive safer and easier during the **Pearblossom Highway Improvement Project**:

Speed up your commute by traveling at non-peak times.

Try to avoid the rush hours of 6 to 9 a.m. and 3 to 7 p.m. by staggering your work schedule and combining trips and errands.

Rideshare whenever possible -- especially during peak traffic hours. Also, consolidate trips and use alternative modes of transportation such as *Metrolink*, carpooling or even your own bicycle.

If your car breaks down during rush hour, use the nearest emergency call box or look for the Los Angeles County Freeway Service Patrol.

Don't get caught by surprise! Plan your commute using the resources listed and always drive safely through construction zones. Also, watch for construction workers and observe posted construction and detour signs.

Don't drink and drive

GLOSSARY

EIR: Environmental Impact Report. The environmental document required under California legislation CEQA)

EA: Environmental Assessment. The environmental document required under Federal legislation (NEPA)

CEQA: California Environmental Quality Act (1970)

NEPA: National Environmenrtal Policy Act (1969)

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